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ABSTRACT

The BRIDGES Project was initiated to explore ways for North Dakota to provide young people with stronger bridges from childhood to adulthood. This report summarizes recommendations of the 1990-91 Governor's Task Force on Early Adolescence. The recommendations concern practical actions for the building of bridges by the following groups: (1) families; (2) communities; (3) local school districts; (4) middle grade educators; (5) the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction; (6) health and human service agencies; (7) colleges and universities; and (8) North Dakota state government. (MM)

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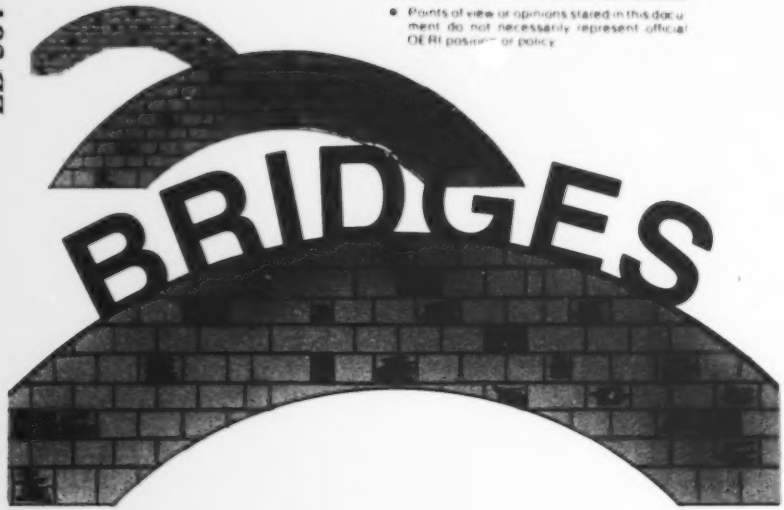

for Young Adolescents in North Dakota

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Governor's Task Force on Early Adolescence

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BRIDGES

for Young Adolescents in North Dakota

Governor's Task Force on Early Adolescence

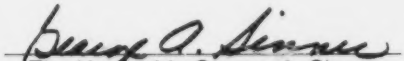
The Governor's Task Force on Early Adolescence was enabled by grants from

Carnegie Corporation of New York,
North Dakota Department of Public Instruction,
and Middle/Junior High Education faculty,
Center for Teaching and Learning,
University of North Dakota

FOREWARD

This report is a response to Turning Points: Preparing Youth for the 21st Century, a national report by the Carnegie Council Task Force on Young Adolescents. The State Task Force appointed by Governor George Sinner has prepared these recommendations for consideration by the Department of Public Instruction, higher education, school boards, educators, and others interested in the education of young adolescents.

We commend the Steering Committee and the State Task Force for their commitment and endeavors in improving middle level education in the State of North Dakota.



The Honorable George A. Sinner
Governor of the State of North Dakota

Wayne G. Sanstead
Superintendent, North Dakota
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INTRODUCTION

During early adolescence, usually encountered between the ages of ten and fifteen, people experience the most dramatic growth period of their lives. The profound physical, social, emotional, and intellectual changes met by young adolescents engage them in critical choices, choices which set the directions for their future lives.

The BRIDGES Project in North Dakota was initiated to explore ways that our state might provide stronger bridges from childhood to adulthood for young people in this perilous time of their lives. This report summarizes recommendations of the Governor's Task Force on Early Adolescence, which met in 1990-91. It makes recommendations for the building of stronger bridges by families of young adolescents, by adults in local communities that include young adolescents, by local school boards, by educators who work with young adolescents, by the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, by the health and human service providers at the local and state levels, by colleges and universities which prepare educators, and by the North Dakota Legislature and the Governor.

The Governors Task Force on Early Adolescence was enabled by grants from Carnegie corporation of New York, North Dakota Department of Public Instruction and Middle/Junior High Education Faculty, Center for Teaching and Learning, University of North Dakota. The principal writer of the task force report was Mary McDonnell Harris.

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Families

Parental support is essential to successful passage from childhood to adulthood. While young adolescents seek a certain amount of control over their own lives, they still want and need love, support, affirmation, and direction from adults, and especially from parents. The bridges built by families for young adolescents are the most important and lasting ones that can be provided during this period. To parents, we recommend:

- Remain involved with young adolescents by spending time together, completing joint projects, and being interested in their friends.
- Let young adolescents know that you love them by appreciating their abilities and contributions, setting guidelines for their activities, and keeping the lines of communication open.
- Learn about influences on young adolescents' lives. Be involved in the school. Get to know coaches, counselors, advisors, and other adults with whom young people are involved both in and out of school. Support programs that are meaningful for young people.
- Offer young adolescents choices with guidance. Early adolescence is a period for exploration of talents and possible life directions.Enable learning about consequences while setting limits in the interest of health and well-being.
- Safeguard the health and safety of young adolescents. During this period a person's body changes dramatically. Be alert to the fears and wonderings that come with having an adult body. Provide accurate health and safety information and adequate care.
- Provide opportunities for young adolescents to give. Early adolescents are idealistic and capable. Com-

munity service offers them ways to explore and experience the affirmation of giving.

- Learn about the middle grade initiative in your community. If you are convinced that a different approach is more appropriate for early adolescents, become involved in rethinking the philosophy and structure of your local schools.

RESOURCES for Families

NDSU Extension Service, Fargo, ND.

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Communities

Partnerships between families and other adults in the community are essential to helping young adolescents enter the wider worlds of adult life. Practices and policies which support the guided entry of young people into the worlds of business, public service, and higher education must be encouraged. Practices and policies which place the expectations of adulthood on young people need to be examined and modified. To communities, we recommend:

- Support a distinctive program for middle grade education. The middle grade initiative of the Carnegie Corporation offers communities a vision of more appropriate education for young adolescents.Community groups who share this vision should offer supportive programs and resources to schools and families.

- Develop extra-curricular and community activities which enable exploratory experiences. Early adolescence is a time for trying out different roles and rarely for making lasting commitments. Assure that opportunities for young adolescents do not place undue stress on performance.

- Provide youth service opportunities. Through service, young adolescents learn more about themselves and the world. In service, they work with adults, learn to assume responsibility, and gain the recognition and self-esteem that comes from giving.

- Ensure young adolescents access to health and social services. Support changes in policy and practice which bring together the work of educators, health care providers, social service providers, law enforcement agencies, child protection agencies and others who work for the welfare of young people.

- Expand career guidance for young adolescents. This is too large a task for school counselors alone. Youth organizations such as Scouts and 4-H, professional organizations, and business sponsored initiatives are all needed to help young people explore a wide range of options and work settings.
- Augment resources for support of young adolescents. The future of our communities depends on a steady flow of qualified workers and consumers and of the goodwill that sustains community life. Businesses and the professions need to support local nonprofit agencies which serve young adolescents and to enter into partnerships with schools on behalf of their growth as citizens.
- Explore resources available from the PTA, the National School Boards Association, and the National Middle School Association. National citizen groups are concerned about middle level education.

RESOURCES for Communities

Carnegie Council of Adolescent Development (1990). *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century.* Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Corporation.

Holleque, Kathryn (1991). Recommendations for parental and community support. A paper commissioned by the Governor's Task Force on Early Adolescence. Grand Forks: The BRIDGES Project, Center for Teaching and Learning, University of North Dakota.

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Local School Districts

The junior high schools common across the United States provide students with an early high school experience. The current middle grade initiative seeks schools more geared to the development of young people in the unique throes of early adolescence. Communities, led by local school boards, need to study ways that schools for young adolescents can become more student-centered, less competitive, more intellectually challenging, less frustrating, and more engaging learning environments.The tenets of middle grade education, whether applied in a middle school, a junior high school, or a school-within-a-school, offer communities different ways to think about schooling for this age group. To local school districts, we recommend:

- Develop a written plan for the education of young adolescents that focuses squarely on their developmental needs. A thorough plan recognizes the middle grades as a distinct level of schooling and attends to school organization, staffing, curriculum development, materials selection, and program policies for this level and its interface with the elementary and secondary levels.

- Establish middle grade curriculum policies which include the following features:

  a. An academically-oriented core curriculum.

  b. A balanced curriculum that integrates language arts and literature, mathematics, history and geography, science, physical education, health, the arts, and exploratory opportunities.

  c. Mastery of the new basics.

  d. Provision for students to develop intercultural and international understandings.

e. Curriculum that fosters student-centered education with emphasis on student reasoning, problem solving, and other life skills.

- Articulate policies which give every young adolescent student access to extracurricular activities. Early adolescent development yields rapid and unpredictable changes in student abilities and interests. Developmentally appropriate programs support exploration and experimentation without undue emphasis on performance.

- Foster school practices which nourish strengths and overcome weaknesses of individual students. Avoid practices which track students by ability, control choices through prerequisites, or limit participation in ways that prevent development of student strengths.

- Provide curricular and extracurricular experiences which enable young adolescents to explore the meaning of citizenship through career awareness, service learning, and service learning, and social action. Living in a democracy requires understanding of complex interdependencies and values. Such understanding must be informed both by study and by first-hand experience.

- Adopt materials selection policies which honor individual and group diversity. Every student needs to find in school evidence of respect and honor for groups to which he or she belongs and high expectations for every student in a multicultural society.

- Enable teaching and school counseling practices which offer students daily contact with a caring group of adults. The expanding social growth of early adolescence requires daily adult guidance beyond the family. Middle schools need to offer students resources to develop self-understanding, positive self-image, and leadership skills.

- Provide students multiple opportunities for success in school. Summer school, extended day programs, homework programs, tutorial programs, academic counseling, and study skill instruction are means of assisting students in achieving successfully.

- Enable teaching, counseling, and consulting practices which offer students-in-need intensive individual help and support. Resources invested in a student at this level provide a "last best chance."

- Establish goals and plans for assessing both the educational programs of the school district (including programs for young adolescents) and the learning of individual/students. Community support of schools deserves a common understanding of expectations and of the means by which progress is determined.

- Develop mechanisms for involving parents and the community in school programs and in policy development. Strong support for young adolescents requires well maintained bridges between the schools and families, between the schools and health and human service providers, and between the schools and business and professional communities.

- Support administrative practices which maximize the autonomy of teams of teachers in making decisions which have direct impact on student learning. Decisions about methods, instructional materials purchase, use of space and time, field experiences, student evaluation, and recruitment of new teachers can often best be made by staff within district guidelines.

- Assure school personnel adequate resources to make a sound transition to more appropriate school practice for young adolescents. Local teams which studied middle grade education in North Dakota have found that a school transition requires time for planning, time

for staff development, and time for rethinking many common school practices. Be prepared for start-up costs in this endeavor.

- Explore resources available from national groups which are studying middle level education.

RESOURCES for Local School Districts

American Association of Secondary School Principals (1990), *Middle Level School Grades and Program Development.* Reston, Virginia.

Carnegie Council of Adolescent Development (1990). *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century.* Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Corporation.

Dahl, Ivan (1991). Recommendations for school practice. A paper commissioned by the Governor's Task Force on Early Adolescence. Grand Forks: The BRIDGES Project, Center for Teaching and Learning, University of North Dakota.

Fivizzani, Marcia (1991). Students at risk. A paper commissioned by the Governor's Task Force on Early Adolescence. Grand Forks: The BRIDGES Project, Center for Teaching and Learning, University of North Dakota.

Harris, Mary (1991). Administration and finance policy implications. A paper commissioned by the Governor's Task Force on Early Adolescence. Grand Forks: The BRIDGES Project, Center for Teaching and Learning, University of North Dakota.

District study team reports on middle grade education to local school boards from a number of North Dakota communities are available from the BRIDGES Project, Center for Teaching and Learning, University of North Dakota.

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Middle Grade Educators

For educators, the challenge is as clear as it is for parents. Early adolescence is the last best chance for many young adolescents to grow and develop in a healthy manner. Problems which surface during the high school years—dropping out, teen pregnancy, truancy, drug and alcohol abuse, academic lethargy—often originate during the middle school years. A good middle grade experience leads students toward greater commitment to school and learning, prosocial behavior, and the development of interests, talent, and self-confidence. Schools for young adolescents must be caring and stimulating places. To middle grade educators, we recommend:

- Ensure that school is a healthy and safe environment. Students and teachers should be safe from violence. Physical health should be protected by policies that prohibit use of tobacco or alcohol or the possession of weapons.

- Develop curriculum that is student-centered and offers students opportunities for success regardless of previous school achievement. The core middle grade curriculum should be organized around themes relevant to young people's own lives and should capitalize on their curiosity about their own development and their place in the larger society.

- Orient curriculum toward acquisition of skills students need today and in their later lives. Students need to learn to think critically, to express themselves and to listen to others, to challenge the reliability of information, to see relationships among ideas, to make constructive contributions, and to gain self-control and autonomy.

- Provide students opportunities for regular exercise and health instruction focused on immediate and future needs. Intramural programs should be available to all students. Comprehensive planning should involve the school administration, health and physical education teachers, counselors, the school nurse, food service staff, and other local resource people, including parents.

- Organize teaching teams which are interdisciplinary. This practice assures coordination of the core curriculum around relevant themes, balance among curricular areas, application of multiple teacher expertise to the challenges posed by learning needs of students, and consistency in approach when corrective action is taken.

- Establish outcome-based assessment practices. Continuous assessment which does not make sharp distinctions between real learning tasks and assessment tasks makes sense to students. Offer students opportunities to show that they can use higher order thinking skills, perform complex tasks, assimilate information across subjects, and apply what they have learned in the real world.

- Assess individual student learning at frequent intervals and reteach those who have not mastered the curriculum. Provide challenging and enriching activities for students with special interests and abilities.

- Organize to offer every student at least one concerned adult who has time and energy to talk every day. Small-group advisories, homerooms, and mentoring programs provide these opportunities.

- Use teaching methods which capitalize on the social interests of young adolescents. Cooperative learning, cross-age tutoring, peer teaching, and study groups are examples of practices which are especially appropriate for this age group.

- Build a comprehensive recognition program that affirms the success of individual students and staff and of the school community in reaching its goals. Multiple definitions of success are essential in assuring recognition of the diverse talents that exist in any vibrant community.

RESOURCES for Middle Grade Educators

Dahl, Ivan (1991). Recommendations for school practice. A paper commissioned by the Governor's Task Force on Early Adolescence. Grand Forks: The BRIDGES Project, Center for Teaching and Learning, University of North Dakota.

Fivizzani, Marcia (1991). Students at risk. A paper commissioned by the Governor's Task Force on Early Adolescence. Grand Forks: The BRIDGES Project, Center for Teaching and Learning, University of North Dakota.

Middle Level School Task Force (1989). *Paths to Success for Middle Level Education in Minnesota*. St. Paul: Minnesota Department of Education.

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (1991). *Last Best Chance: Middle Grades Task Force Report*. Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.

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Department of Public Instruction

Many of the barriers to development of distinctive middle grade education in North Dakota stem from the traditional view that education is either "elementary" or "secondary." The organization of the Department of Public Instruction reflects this view. Accreditation standards designed for neither elementary nor secondary schools are ideal for middle grade education. Teacher preparation for neither the elementary nor the secondary levels is ideal for teaching in a middle school. A third alternative is needed and must be recognized in the structures which reflect and form our concept of public education in North Dakota. To the Department of Public Instruction, we recommend:

- Lead the state in forming a vision of a stronger support system for our young people in the vulnerable early adolescent years. Use all means available to develop awareness of better practice for this age group.
- Form a Middle Education unit analogous to the existing Elementary and Secondary units in the Department. This unit will lead thinking about an appropriate education for students at this level.
- Review the current standards for the middle school endorsement. Permit persons whose initial licensure is at the middle level to qualify for endorsements as counselors, administrators, and specialists. Study the structure of teacher preparation programs to determine appropriate certification preparation levels within the state.
- Develop standards for the accreditation of middle schools which serve students in grades 5-8, 6-8, or 7-8. As schools make a transition from existing to newly-

developed standards, provide for waivers that enable thoughtfully-planned transitions.

- Change the reporting and accounting formats currently required by the Department to include a middle grade classification along with elementary and secondary. Modify the North Dakota School District Accounting and Reporting Manual and related databases accordingly.
- Provide local districts with guidance in development of core curriculum appropriate for use in a middle school. Particular attention is needed in definition of common expectations and in developing appropriate assessment of student learning outcomes.
- Include consideration of interdisciplinary, thematically-developed curricular approaches in the subject area curriculum guides provided by the Department of Public Instruction.
- Continue to assist educators in finding instructional strategies which support student development and which enable students with basic skill deficiencies to develop higher order thinking skills.
- Develop accreditation guidelines which require and support parent involvement in school and provide models of effective practice.
- Authorize study of the costs of middle school operation in relation to the cost of elementary and secondary schools.

RESOURCES for the Department of Public Instruction

Harris, Mary (1991). Administration and finance policy implications. A paper commissioned by the Governor's Task Force on Early Adolescence. Grand Forks: The BRIDGES Project, Center for Teaching and Learning, University of North Dakota.

Thompson, Lowell (1991). School and Higher Education Personnel. A paper commissioned by the Governor's Task Force on Early Adolescence. Grand Forks: The BRIDGES Project, Center for Teaching and Learning, University of North Dakota.

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Health and Human Service Agencies

Collaboration is essential in helping young people deal with the complex problems they may face along with the normal developmental tasks of early adolescence. Young adolescents have no background for dealing with services scattered across a variety of agencies. Existing services must come together, ideally in the school setting, to offer such basic services as employment training, health screening and referral, and mental health or family counseling. Communities will also need to consider probation counseling, child care, parenting skills instruction, drug and alcohol treatment, and outreach to adolescents who have left school. To health and human service providers, we recommend:

- Engage in collaborative assessment of needs of young adolescents in your service area and explore ways they might be addressed through coordination of services.
- Organize at the state level a coordinating council to recommend and encourage development of models for coordinated health and human service delivery for young adolescents in the school setting.
- Organize at the local level a community coordinating board for health and human service providers to explore consolidation and coordination of services directed toward recognized needs of young adolescents.
- Utilize the expertise of school counselors in recognizing problems commonly faced by young adolescent students which demand services beyond the scope of the school.
- Recognize that the identification of high risk factors

for young adolescents must be to connect them with appropriate sources of help and support, not to label or stereotype them or to place limits on their future opportunities.

RESOURCES for Health and Human Service Providers

Fivizzani, Marcia (1991). Students at risk. A paper commissioned by the Governor's Task Force on Early Adolescence. Grand Forks: The BRIDGES Project, Center for Teaching and Learning, University of North Dakota.

Holleque, Kathryn (1991). Recommendations for parental and community support. An paper commissioned by the Governor's Task Force on Early Adolescence. Grand Forks: The BRIDGES Project, Center for Teaching and Learning, University of North Dakota.

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Colleges and Universities

There is a growing consensus that teachers of middle grade students should be certified with preparation that draws on the strengths of elementary and secondary models of teacher preparation but differs from either. Currently 28 states certify teachers specially prepared for the middle level, and 14 others are considering such a change. The traumatic physical, social, emotional, and cognitive changes which occur in early adolescence justify a different preparation for the educators who teach, counsel, and work with them on a daily basis. To North Dakota institutions that prepare educators, we recommend:

- Develop programs of preparation specifically for middle level teachers. Guidelines for such programs have been developed by the National Middle School Association and include the study of young adolescent development, middle grade curriculum and instruction, and preparation in at least two teaching fields.

- Develop programs that enable the certified elementary and secondary teachers who already work with young adolescents to deepen their knowledge of the implications of early adolescent development for school practice. The literature in this field has grown tremendously in the last few years.

- Provide inservice opportunities for educators who have made a commitment to move toward more developmentally appropriate schooling for young adolescents to learn in depth about specific practices that characterize effective middle schools.

- Include specific attention to young adolescent development and recommended middle level practice within preparation programs for principals, counselors, specialists, and superintendents.

- Include specific attention to leadership for school restructuring in the preparation of school administrators. The ability to lead development of a community vision, build coalitions around a vision, and bring together resources must be developed.
- Cooperate with the Department of Public Instruction, professional organizations, the Teacher Center Network, and local school districts in supporting the middle grade initiative.
- Undertake research which can better inform the practice of middle level education in North Dakota.
- Assure that preparation for health and human service providers includes attention to the needs of young adolescents and that educator preparation develops skills needed to work collaboratively with other agencies on behalf of students.

RESOURCES for Colleges and Universities

Thompson, Lowell (1991). School and Higher Education Personnel. A paper commissioned by the Governor's Task Force on Early Adolescence. Grand Forks: The BRIDGES Project, Center for Teaching and Learning, University of North Dakota.

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State Government

The biggest challenge we face in North Dakota is changing public expectations. Providing better education for young adolescents requires that parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, neighbors, and friends expect stronger connections among families, schools, and communities on behalf of young people. It requires that citizens expect schools of the future to be different from schools of the past in important and powerful ways. State government is a reflection of the public will to act. Action toward appropriate middle grade education requires adequate moral and financial support. Toward this end, we recommend to state government:

- Recognize that better support for young adolescents will not emerge in the same way in every community. Avoid development of policy which anticipates that every school will become a middle school or that coordinated service delivery for early adolescents will always occur in the same way.

- Offer incentives for schools to move toward more developmentally appropriate practice for young adolescents. On-going costs include a fully supported operating budget which enables team planning and advisory time. Transitional costs include initial planning and staff development and facility renovation.

- Offer incentives for health and human service agencies to coordinate service delivery with schools. Full use of existing school facilities through coordinated service provision must be encouraged.

- Provide Foundation Aid support adequate to operate the schools of North Dakota, adjusting the formula to recognize middle schools as an alternative to elementary and secondary schools.

- Support the work of the Department of Public Instruction and collaborating state agencies in focusing on the education of early adolescents. The changes in state regulation and enforcement recommended here will carry a start-up cost.

RESOURCES for State Government

Harris, Mary (1991). Administration and finance policy implications. A paper commissioned by the Governor's Task Force on Early Adolescence. Grand Forks: The BRIDGES Project, Center for Teaching and Learning, University of North Dakota.

Toepfer, C. F. (Winter, 1990). Revisioning Middle Level Education: A Prelude to Restructuring Schools. *Educational Horizons*, 95-99.